9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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potato was one of the factors that led to the decline of rundale agriculture, both because of its late harvest and because it resulted in increased populations which brought disastrous subdivision of the holdings. Under the " gavelkind " code of inheritance a man's property was divided equally among all his sons, so that the impossibly small fields came to be spoken of not as the standard " cow's grass," but as a " foot " and even a half-foot or " cleet."

Much has been written of the drawbacks of the rundale system. It is so easy to condemn it—the " fights, trespasses, confusion, disputes and assaults " to which it gave rise, the wretched poverty which it bred, the evil consequences of dwelling in packed house clusters—that it is well to recall the better side of the system before it fell into decline. A writer in 1853 has left his " recollections of nights of social converse, of aid in sickness, of sympathy in joy and sorrow, of combined operations of defence against bailiff or gauger which contrasted mournfully with the solitary grandeur of the new dwelling." Another apologist wrote : " the closer the rundale system is followed, the more the unwritten customs and regulations observed, the more do intelligent tenants regret a departure from them." Many of its better features, indeed, have survived the enclosure movement and the separation of farms ; we may cite co-operation in farm work and the social fire-side evenings or " caileys." " Gatherings " of many kinds, for work and pleasure, distinguished the rundale communities. Every village had its musician, piper or fiddler, who was often maimed in some way and supported himself by his skill. Folk songs, occupational airs and epic tales were kept alive in this way.

It was formerly the task of an appointed leader in a townland or group of townlands to see that customs were observed, to arrange the casting of lots in re-allotting strips, and so on. Probably we should see in the " king " not long ago recognized as leader in such communities as Rathlin and Tory a relic of this custom.

To understand the village-system in working order we must see it as part of a wider pattern in which cattle-herding

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
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226 to him by old fishermen at from £30 to £100, so that the loss of this industry must have told considerably on a poor community such as this. The primitive method which he found in use on his visit to the islands he describes in full as it was explained by Michael Halloran, the 'king'[1] of Inishshark, a veteran harpooner, who had just killed his nineteenth fish a few days before.

"I had been told that these sun-fish generally took from sixteen to eighteen hours, and frequently longer, to kill; in fact, I have heard it sometimes took two days, so naturally felt considerable interest in the gear used for the purpose. The king brought with him his trusty harpoon, which, to my mind, looked a most antiquated arrangement, especially designed to cut out of a fish, instead of holding it. I could not see a whale-boat or anything like one, so inquired where the boat was, and was shown an ordinary square-sterned boat, about 16 feet in the keel, which had nailed on her starboard bow a piece of wood about 1 foot long, with three small notches, or scores, barely half an inch deep, cut in it. I found out that these notches or scores were all they had to run the line through, and that when a boat fastened a fish, it was a pulling match between our friend the shark on one hand, and sixteen men on the other, a regular case of 'pull devil, pull baker'! Such a thing as a bollard head to take a turn of the line round seems never to have entered their heads."

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In addition to fishing and farming, the other occupations are fish-curing at the station recently established by the landlord, Cyril Allies, Esq., J.P., who resides on the island, and personally superintends it, and the trades, represented by a boat-builder, a blacksmith, a shoemaker who imports his leather from the mainland, a tailor, who still adheres to the old method of measuring his clients without a tape, using instead a sheet of paper, on which the several lengths are recorded by "snips," or notches cut with the scissors; there is one weaver who makes use of a rather archaic form of hand-loom, four men who, on occasion, act as sawyers, extemporising a saw-pit in the nearest convenient spot by the aid of trestles, and using to mark their lines a cord blackened with the ashes of straw or shavings, and finally, a fiddler.

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[1] In answer to an inquiry of mine relative to the position of king, Mr. Myles Joyce, National Teacher of Bofin, writes:—"The title of king is not hereditary in the island. There is at present a man removed something beyond his neighbours in the way of education and position, who is, *par excellence*, the king; and to whom all persons who want any information about the island or its history must apply."